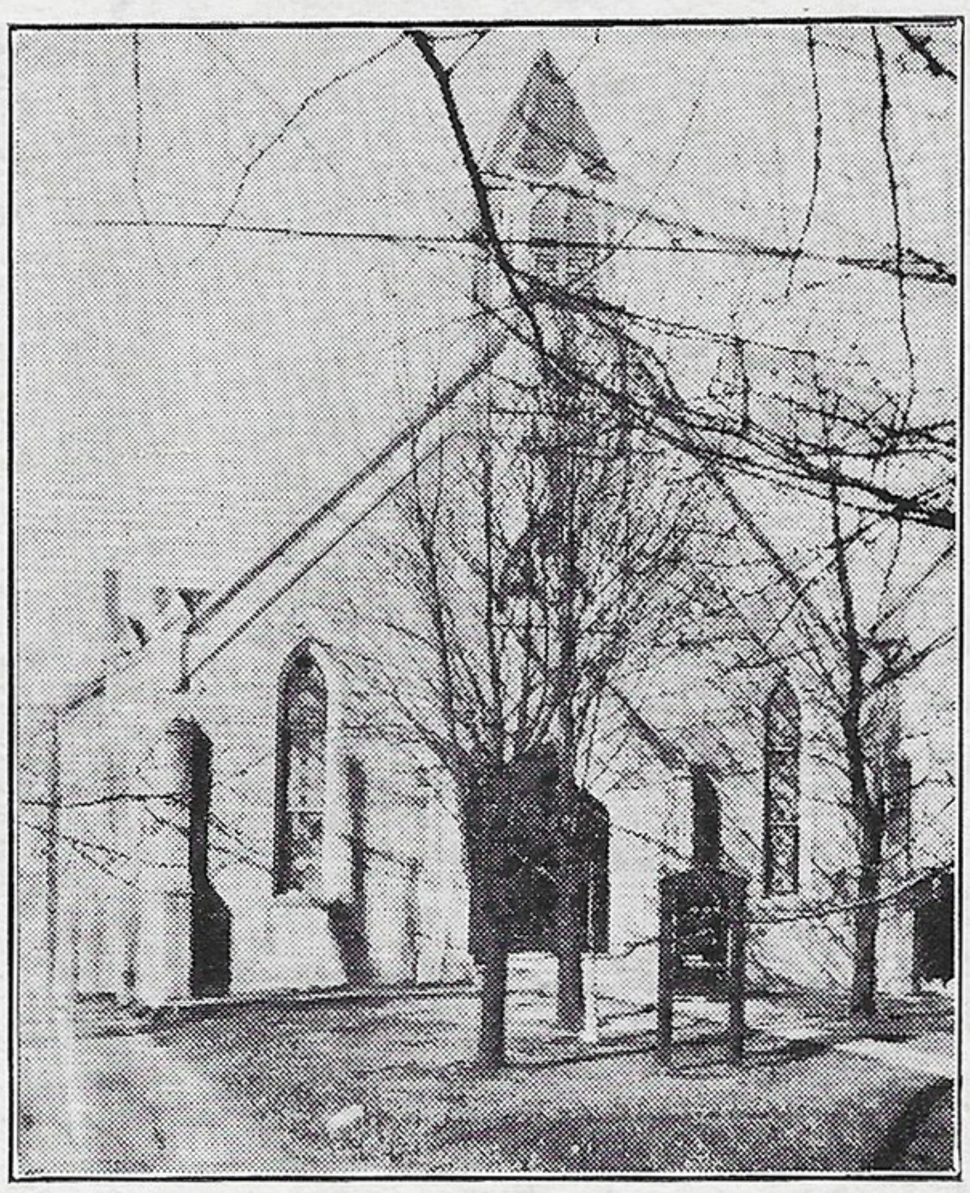
Dedication of Bronze Marker

on the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Extension of the Norriton Parish to Lower Providence, Pa.



Lower Providence Church, 1868, Showing Front Added 1878

Held in

The Lower Providence Presbyterian Church

Ridge Pike, Lower Providence Township, Montgomery County, Penna.

Sunday, December 14, 1930

at 10.30 A. M.

The Rev. R. L. Williams, D. D., Pastor

Order of Service

Prelude—"Jubilate Deo" ..... *Silver*
Wallace D. Angstadt, Organist
Invocation
Cello Solo—"The Swan" ..... *Saint-Saens*
"Serenade" ..... *Driga*
Robert Rehrer
Psalter—Psalms 121 and 122 ..... Selection 48
Vocal Duet—"Homeland" ..... *Rockwell*
Carl Marburger, Frank Laprise
Offering
Cello Solo—"Souvenir" ..... *Drdla*
Robert Rehrer
Choir—"Great and Marvelous" ..... *Turner*
Address ..... The Rev. Richard Montgomery, S.T.D.,
Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Philadelphia—North

DEDICATION OF TABLET

NORRITON-LOWER PROVIDENCE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
FOUNDED
AT NORRITON PRIOR TO 1698 A.D.

The original stone building (1698) still standing on the Germantown Pike at Fairview Village.

Doubtless the oldest memento of Presbyterian enterprise within the bounds of Pennsylvania.

AT LOWER PROVIDENCE—THIS PLACE—1730 A.D.

Five church buildings have been erected successively on these grounds: A. D. 1730, 1741, 1775, 1844, 1868.

Known by 1758 A. D. as the united congregations of Norriton and New Providence.

Incorporated into one body by State Charter 1822 A. D.

Felicitations:

The Augustus Lutheran Church, Trappe, Pa. Founded 1730 A. D., The Rev. W. O. Fegley, D.D., pastor.

The Montgomery County Historical Society, Nelson P. Fegley, Esq., President.

The Valley Forge Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Mrs. John Rex, Regent.

Recessional Hymn 117
Postlude—"Postlude in G" ..... *Hosmer*
Dedicatory Statement:

This tablet we dedicate this day to the glory of God and of His Christ. May it ever tell the passerby how long God's favor has been in this place; and may it ever serve as a reminder to the household of God who worship here that their inheritance has been preserved to them by the unwavering perseverance and unswerving fidelity of a long line of spiritual forebears.

Unveiling of the Tablet

By Mildred Elizabeth Fox and Charles Walker Fox whose families have been in the Church since the beginning, 1730 (John Edwards, Sr., born 1701, died 1791).

Doxology
Benediction

Congregational History

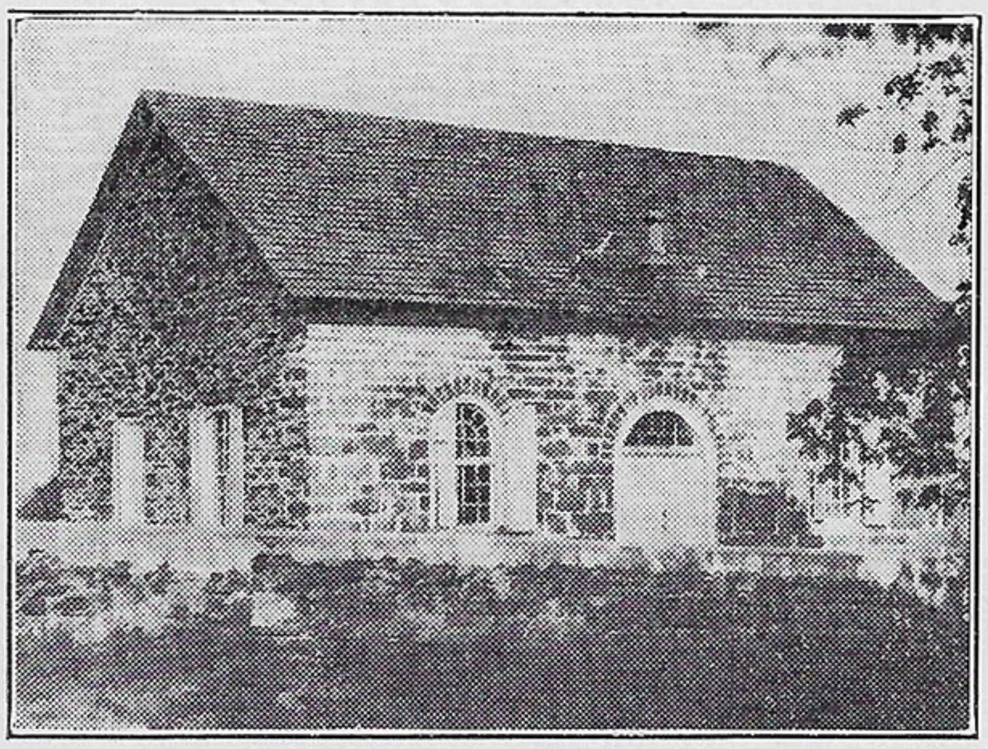
The congregational history of Norriton and Lower Providence Presbyterian Church runs back into the mists of the seventeenth century. Dr. Thomas Murphy, in his "Presbytery of the Log College," asserts that the graveyard at Norriton dates back to 1678.

What Presbyterian minister first proclaimed the Gospel within the bounds of the Norriton-Providence parish we do not know. Francis MacKemie, in a letter dated July 28, 1685, makes mention that one Mr. W. Wardrope, a Presbyterian minister, removed to Pennsylvania to preach. Tradition fixed the place as Norriton, and it is supposed also that MacKemie himself preached here, 1692.

The first authentic record of a settled pastor is that of an elderly minister from Wales, Malachi Jones, who in 1714 took charge of Norriton Church and the same year established the Abington Church, but there was a congregation and preaching here in Norriton before that date. The earliest authentic notice of preaching in the Norriton region was that of David Evans (1705), who also preached in the Great Valley across the river (Schuylkill) in 1710, when he was called to account by Presbytery for preaching without a license. However, we know that the beginnings of this Church in the Great Valley as a distinct congregation antedate the year 1710, for, headed by an elder, this congregation came over in a body from Wales in 1683. So also in the case of our sister Church, the Augustus Lutheran Church of Trappe, Pa., which this Fall (1930) celebrated its two hundredth anniversary; its earliest date as an organization goes beyond that of its first installed pastor, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1742) to the year 1730, when John Casper Stoever, Jr., appeared among the Lutherans living about Trappe and, although unordained, performed ministerial acts and began the first written record of congregational life in that place.

Congregational history seems to have developed in this order; first a religious group; then a temporary place of meeting as a house or barn; besides this, a burial place; next a log church building usually where they were wont to lay away their dead; this to be displaced by a permanent structure, perhaps of stone, the deed to the property being secured many years later.

There has been only one improved church edifice at Norriton, the building still standing since 1698. It is distinctly in the seventeenth century style of architecture. Originally it had an old hip roof, but this was changed to the present plain type in 1775. Fortunately, the Rev. Charles Collins has recorded a description of the interior of the church. "I remember well as a lad of ten years of age, the internal parts of this Church. I speak of it as it appeared between 1833 and 1843. The pews were of the old style, hard board seats, very high straight backs, so that a child, with difficulty, could see over them; one aisle in the centre, entering from the door, with two



square blocks of pews, on either side of the pulpit. The corner blocks of pews made recesses, in which space stood two old fashioned stoves, designed for burning long sticks of wood, each stove conveying tortuous sheet-iron stove pipes to the chimneys on either side.

"The quaint pulpit of the olden time would be regarded as a rare curiosity today. Its dimensions were only large enough for a single good-sized man. Where the minister stood to preach was a closely confined place with three panelled sides, having a small desk for the Bible and hymn book, the woodwork being dark oak. The steps ascending to the pulpit were narrow and spiral, while directly over the preacher's head was a conspicuous round, arched sounding board of perhaps three feet in diameter, neatly made out of selected walnut boards. Immediately behind the speaker, upon either side, were two small windows."

Alas and alack, this ancient furniture was torn out in 1844 to give place to new pulpit and pews—but in the same style; these in turn were destroyed by fire in 1903.

In this sacred place distinguished men have worshipped. In October, 1778, when Washington was putting up at Peter Wentz Tavern on Skippack Pike, three miles distant, he joined the congregation in worship here. This is quite probable for on an old map a stone house a few rods from the Church is marked as Washington's Headquarters and it also accords with his custom. The Winter before, 1777, at Morristown, New Jersey, as the communion approached, Washington asked Dr. Timothy Johnes, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in that place, whether one had to be a member of the Presbyterian Church to commune with them. On receiving the reply, "All who love the Lord Jesus are welcome," he replied, "That is right," and thereupon fellowshipped with them in this sacred ordinance. This service was held in the open air, in a sheltered spot, even though it was winter, for the Church was at the time fully occupied as a hospital.

In their old age Collins conversed with grandchildren of the first settlers who "could distinctly recall the presence of Benjamin Franklin in attendance at the Church, both before and after his return as Minister to France. He was accompanied each time by the astronomer, David Rittenhouse." Rittenhouse's farmstead adjoined the Norriton Church grounds.

Here the Porters worshipped and here they held rule as elders. The Porters have been described as the most useful family Pennsylvania has produced, furnishing the nation with many generals, governors, judges, preachers, et al.

Before Washington's Army went into encampment at Valley Forge his soldiers were quartered in the Norriton Church and during the encampment it was used as a hospital. It was in the line of the British patrol, and was made use of by them. Because of the damage the Church suffered during the War, the Pennsylvania Assembly, by an Act of September 17, 1785, authorized a lottery to raise money for repairing the property.

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In the year 1730 the momentum of the work carried over into Providence, a township, which the year before had been carved out of Norriton Township. This became the principal seat of congregational activity as is indicated by the fact that all of the succeeding Churches were built on the Lower Providence grounds.

The question arises, naturally, why two church buildings for the one congregation. Perhaps the same desire for the erection of a separate township moved to the erection of a separate church building in the new township. The

centre of population shifted from Norriton to Providence. In 1734 the new township had seventy-four land owners and tenants, while the old township, Norriton, had only twenty. Doubtless, a cemetery had already been established on the grounds where the new Church was built.

Buck, in his history of Montgomery County, expresses surprise at finding in the graveyard of the Lower Providence Baptist Church gravestones older than the Church itself, but so it is at Norriton, a graveyard older than the Church as such and so it appears to be in the case of the Lower Providence Presbyterian Church. Only one field-stone grave marker is legible—one in memory of Abigail, the wife of jerimiah Peck, dyed the 17th of february 1711, aged 49 years 7 months. "Remember me as you pass by, etc." The stone would seem to indicate an earlier date for the burial ground than 1730.

Whether this removal of the Church in part from Norriton to Providence in 1730 was on account of dissension is not clear. It is significant, however, that the pastor, when this occurred was the Rev. David Evans, who quit Norriton the very next year, 1731. Evans, as pastor of the Great Valley Church in Chester County, later got involved in difficulty with his elders and congregation in that place and often had outspoken differences with his ministerial brethren in the Presbytery. In 1739 his Great Valley Church brought charges of ecclesiastical tyranny against him. The following year he quit there also. His farewell sermon was, according to tradition, merely, "Goats I found you; goats I leave you"—only this and nothing more. From here he went to the Pilesgrove Church (Salem, N. J.). It was there that a member of his congregation jumped out of the Church window rather than listen to his blistering sermon a moment longer.

The ordination of John Rowland in 1741 caused a division not only in the Norriton and Providence Churches, but in the entire denomination. This was the great Schism of 1741. The famous evangelist George Whitefield's visitation to the colonies had stirred up a spirit of revival and had introduced a new emphasis on certain doctrines, in particular that of conversion and personal assurance of salvation. This developed into quite a cult. Some of the more staid ministers remained unmoved by the movement. A number of pastors, consumed with a zeal for the revival of the people in the parishes of neighboring ministers invaded these pastorates, for instance, Gilbert Tennent, of Neshaminy, came into the Norriton-Providence field. This practice gave great offence everywhere. It all came to a head June 1, 1741, when the flaming evangelist, Licentiate John Rowland, recently graduated in the first class to come out of Log College (Hartsville, Bucks Co.), was ordained by the Presbytery of Brunswick without the assent of Synod. It was thought by Synod that the Log College was not of high enough grade scholastically.

Four months later Rowland was made the pastor of Providence Church, the Norriton Church adhering to the old side. From then on the star of Norriton seems to have waned.

Rowland attempted to extend his field of labor across the Schuylkill into the Great Valley, the Church there having been vacated by David Evans with his "goats I found you—goats I leave you" sermon. Many in this congregation favored the New Light side and welcomed Rowland but the authorities locked him out of the Church. Thereupon the most populous part of the field, Charlestown (near Phoenixville, Pa.), set itself up as an independent Church. Rowland made his residence there and served both Providence and Charlestown from this point. He had his best success in Providence. We learn this from his own pen—a letter to a Dr. Prince, of Boston, in 1744.

The grandparents of Dr. Archibald Alexander of blessed Princeton memory were fruits of Rowland's evangelistic labor at Providence. Four or

five years after the revival, 1748, the Alexanders, Todds, and others migrated to Virginia to form the New Providence Church there, which in turn sent a group to Tennessee to establish a third New Providence Church. The Providence Church has sent out into the service other distinguished sons and daughters, notably the Hamills, Henrys, and Nassaus.

The two Churches, Norriton and New Providence, as it was now known, remained apart seventeen years, until 1758 when the breach in the denomination was healed. During this time Norriton was associated with the Great Valley Church. Because of "the necessity in the Great Valley" Presbytery sent thither the Rev. David Alexander. David Evans had stormed out of the field and the congregation was affected by the New Light excitement. It seems that Alexander died the next year and Samuel Evans, the son of David, two years out of Yale, took his place. "Norrington having been rent asunder he was directed to supply the Old side remnant." He held this charge until 1747, when he relinquished it without consent of Presbytery and was disowned for doing so. In 1753 John Kinkead comes on the Great Valley-Norriton scene. "A member of the congregation of Norrington applied to the Synod, supplicating the ordination of Mr. Kinkead as fast as our stated rules and methods will permit." He, too, was disowned by Synod in 1757. An old manuscript characterizes him as "an unprincipled and profligate man."

The Providence Church fared better; it had a regular succession of satisfactory pastorates without long pauses between. From Charlestown, Rowland served Providence from 1741 to 1745. On its becoming vacant, the former pastor, Richard Treat, attached it to his Abington field, 1745-1747, with the famous missionary to the Indians, David Brainerd, for his assistant. Campbell lived on the field, 1747-1753, and is buried in the Providence Cemetery. Chestnut, who followed him in 1753, had as his parish Faggs Manor (Chester Co.), Forks of the Delaware, Charlestown and New Providence. In 1756 he accepted a call to the last two and settled at Providence. His wife, Judith, lies in the Providence Cemetery under a crumbling stone. In May, 1763, he quit because his churches were back $350 on a $220 yearly salary. In November of the same year the congregations offered to pay him him $250 a year and it is understood he remained on the field until 1765. Old chroniclers describe him as a "hum-drum preacher." It was during his pastorate that the reunion of 1758 brought Norriton and Providence together again.

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The first place of worship at Lower Providence was a log building (1730). The separation in 1741 was marked by the erection of a more permanent building, a stone structure. The location of this stone church is easily inferred from the positions of the graves of the Rev. John Campbell and of Judith Chestnut, the wife of his successor.

The death of Mr. Campbell was under dramatic circumstances. As he opened the Sunday morning service May 1, 1753, by lining off the paraphrase of Psalm 116:15, "Dear in thy sight is thy saint's death. Thy servant, Lord, am I," he was stricken with paralysis. A letter dated May 29, 1753, mentions it. "A zealous and useful young minister (he was forty) was struck in the pulpit with a dead palsy and died little more than a week later." The inscription on his gravestone was prepared by his boyhood friend, the distinguished Dr. Samuel Davies, President of the College of New Jersey (Princeton):

"In yonder house I spent my breath,
Now, silent sleeping, here I lie in death.
These silent lips shall awake and yet declare
A dread Amen to truths they uttered there."

The first church edifice to appear on this exact spot where the congregation worships today was erected in 1775 during the pastorate of the Rev. David McCalla. McCalla entered the American Army as a chaplain. "His regiment marched to Canada where he was taken prisoner." His successor, Tennent, tells us that on his being paroled he returned to his charge in Norriton and Providence. Members of his flock followed his example, becoming enlisted men and officers; many of whom lie buried in the graveyard adjoining and also at Norriton. John Crawford, whose grave is in the Providence God's-acre, helped to row General Washington across the Delaware to the Battle of Trenton.

The bit of paper showing the surveyor's sketch of the church plot is in the archives of the congregation and next to the original deeds is the oldest (1774) original record extant. It is entitled "A Draught of a Lott of ground for a meeting house." The notation on the West side reads, "The graveyard on the other Meeting House Lott." The other Meeting House is, of course, the 1741 Church.

We know but little of the architecture of this 1775 building. We do know, however, that it had box pews and perhaps was heated with wood stoves, for the resolutions concerning the construction of the succeeding church building, 1844, provide that in the new church "the pews be without doors and that the house be heated with coal stoves." Before 1844 there was no fuel bill, all the money recorded went to the preacher and that was not much. In the earliest churches there was neither heat nor artificial light; the worshippers brought candles and stayed the chill of winter with heated billets of hardwood wrapped in cloth; these they held on their knees until their feet got too cold —and the sermons were not short.

The early church buildings were small because the congregations were small. On one occasion William Tennent reported to Presbytery sixty-five members at Abington and thirty-five at Norriton and Providence and "contain the whole Presbyterian interest in the County of Montgomery." Today Norriton and Providence numbers about 600 members and more than 450 in its Sunday School.

Although the early church membership was so small, we still have with us as members, families whose people have worshipped in all of the churches which have stood on these grounds since 1730. John Edwards, enumerated in the Lower Providence census of 1734, is still represented by the Crawfords. His son, Major John Edwards, Jr., together with John Chain, Arthur McFarland and Robert Todd (great uncle of Abraham Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd) were the officers who received the lot of ground (1775) in trust for the congregation. Thomas Francis, born 1701, still has his family in Lower Providence Congregation. Others go back to the second building if not to the early log meeting house. Henry Teany, born 1740, has his name still preserved by active members of the present congregation. John Teany, the grandfather of our present worshippers, was born in 1772 and died in 1869, hence he saw all of the buildings except the first, the ones of 1741, 1775, 1844 and the present structure of 1868. On the precious scrap of paper, the surveyor's draught of 1744, appears the name of Paul Castleberry as owner of adjacent land. Many Casselberrys with their names concealed by inter-marriage, are still with us. The name Highley appears on old tombstones. John Highley, born in 1745, has his name on the roll of members at this present date, 1930. The Getty family registers an early date, 1741. It is believed that our Campbells, whose grandfather bore the names of two of the early ministers,—the first to live

on the field—Rowland and Campbell, connect this present with the times of the Rev. M. John Campbell, 1747–1753. Doubtless, other old family names could be traced from the Revolutionary and pre-Revolutionary period to the present membership.

From the following curious cemetery rule adopted in 1823 we learn that the building of 1775 was repaired in 1822 or thereabouts. "For every corpse interred who may not have within two years contributed toward the support of the Gospel . . . or not have contributed toward *the late repairs of the Providence Church,* or graveyard shall be paid to the sexton at or before the interrment the sum of two dollars in addition to the customary fee for his labour."

A congregational meeting held in January, 1844, did two things. It gave order for the repair of the old Norriton Church and it authorized the raising of a subscription of $1500 for the rebuilding of the Providence Church. Woe is us for that first order! It resulted in the displacement of the ancient furniture of the historic old shrine by more modern specimens, which in turn, as already stated, were destroyed by fire a generation ago. It seems to have been a habit to tamper with the little fane whenever a new church was built at Providence. In 1775 the historic roof went and in 1844 the historic furniture. Little more than a generation later it was proposed by those who thronged its limited quarters to make some kind of an addition to the sacred shrine. What a mutilation that would have been!

After the new Church at Lower Providence was completed, 1844, the trustees "agreed that a stable or open shed be erected for the accommodation of the L. Providence Cong'n," the first of the sheds. The official record of the laying of the cornerstone of this Church, May 25, 1844, informs us that into the "zink box embedded within a wooden case" went "a brief history of the Church in this place." What a pity we do not have it today! Perhaps it is in the cornerstone of the present building erected in 1868. The Charlestown Church became extinct about twenty years ago. Its neglected property is now up for sale. Certainly its cornerstone, if it have one, ought to be reserved and its precious contents preserved.

Henry S. Rodenbaugh, a lay member of the Lower Providence Church (received by certificate April 5, 1844), was ordained and installed March 14, 1846, and was at the same time set over the newly organized Church at Port Kennedy. This connection he held for twenty-seven years. The fruitfulness of his labor at Lower Providence is indicated by the circumstance that within two decades the comparatively new Church had become too small to accommodate the congregation and had to give place to a more commodious house in 1868. The Gothic front which robbed a perfect Georgian structure of its symmetry was added in 1878; other additions were made in the rear in later years.

"On Thursday, the 3rd of June," reads a minute in the sessional record of 1869, "the new building was dedicated to the worship of Almighty God, Father, Son and Spirit; the whole, complete and free from debt, all the expenses of erection and furnishing having been met by the cheerful labor, and the generous gifts of the members and friends of the congregation. It is the Lord's House. May His presence ever fill it and His glory be ever there displayed." To this we say this day. Amen!

R. L. W.

Roll of Pastors

NORRITON

Malachi Jones (With Abington and Great Valley) 1714-1727
David Evans, M.A., V.D.M. (With Great Valley) 1727-1731

NORRITON AND PROVIDENCE

Richard Treat (With Abington) 1731-1741

NORRITON WITH GREAT VALLEY

David Alexander 1741
Samuel Evans 1742-1747
John Kinkead 1753-1757

(NEW) PROVIDENCE WITH CHARLESTOWN

John Rowland 1741-1745
Richard Treat (With Abington) 1745-1747
David Brainerd, Assistant
M. John Campbell 1747-1753
Benjamin Chestnut (Also with Faggs Manor and Forks of Delaware, 1753-1756) 1753-1765

NORRITON AND (NEW) PROVIDENCE

With Abington

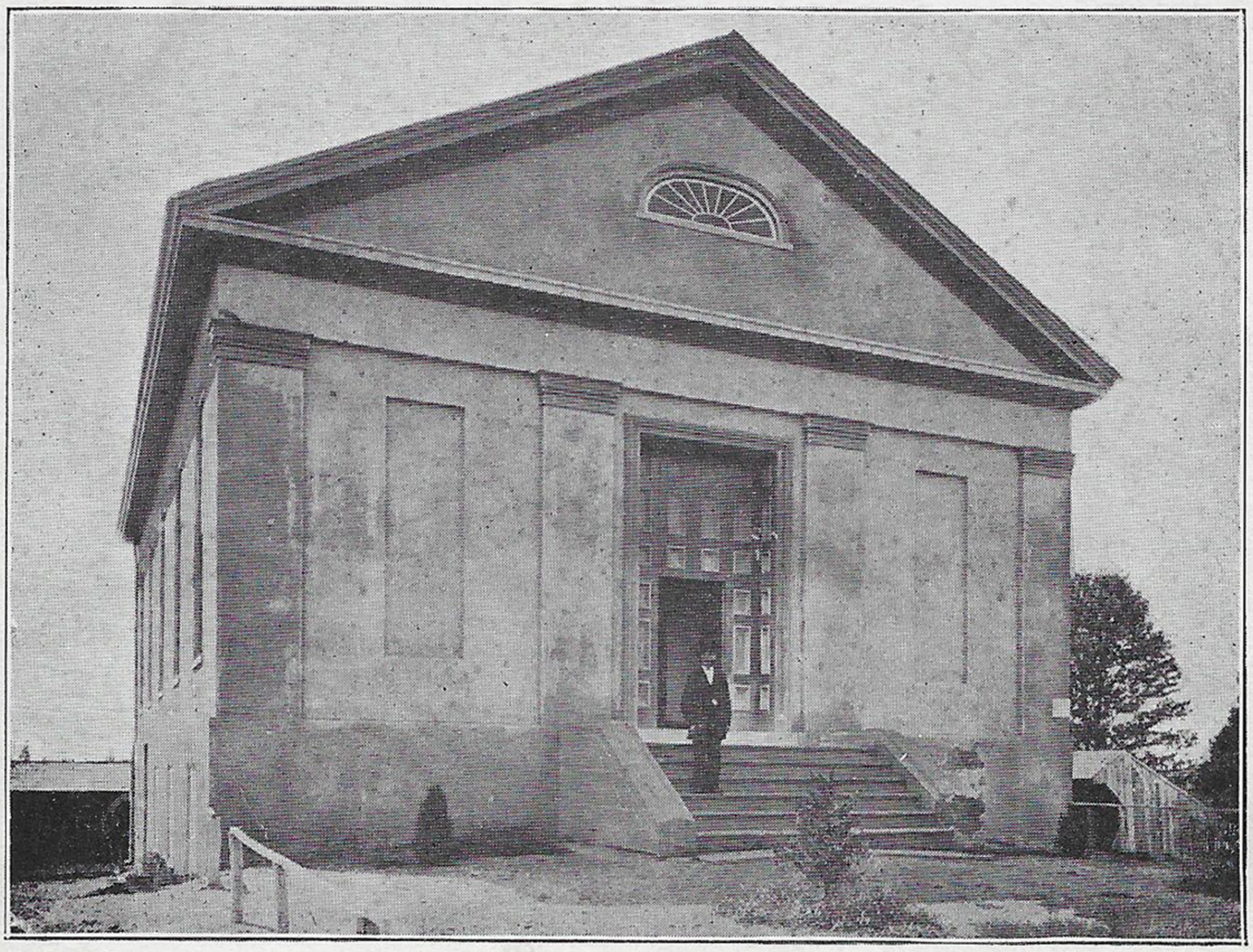
Richard Treat 1765-1772
David McCalla 1772-1780

With Abington

William M. Tennent, D.D. 1782-1812
Joseph Barr (With Norristown) 1814-1817

Chartered in 1822 under the name of
NORRITON AND LOWER PROVIDENCE

John Smith (With Norristown)
Joshua Moore (With Norristown)
Thomas Eustice (With Norristown)
Charles W. Nassau, D. D. 1825-1828
William Woolcott 1834
Robert Landis 1835-1839
Sylvanus Haight 1839-1845
Henry S. Rodenbaugh (With Port Kennedy 1846-1877) ..1846-1890
Claude R. Brodhead 1890-1902
T. Reber Taggart 1902-1907
Irvin F. Wagner 1908-1918
Richard L. Williams, D.D. 1918-



Lower Providence Church, 1868

As it appeared before the new front was added in 1878

Standing on the steps: the Rev. Henry S. Rodenbaugh, Pastor